Sri Krishna Kathamrita Bindu

Issue 626

Sampradāya-bheda-agni

The Fire of Sectarianism

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तवकथामृतं तप्तजीवनम्
tava kathāmṛtaṁ tapta-jīvanam

Sri Krishna Kathamrita Bindu

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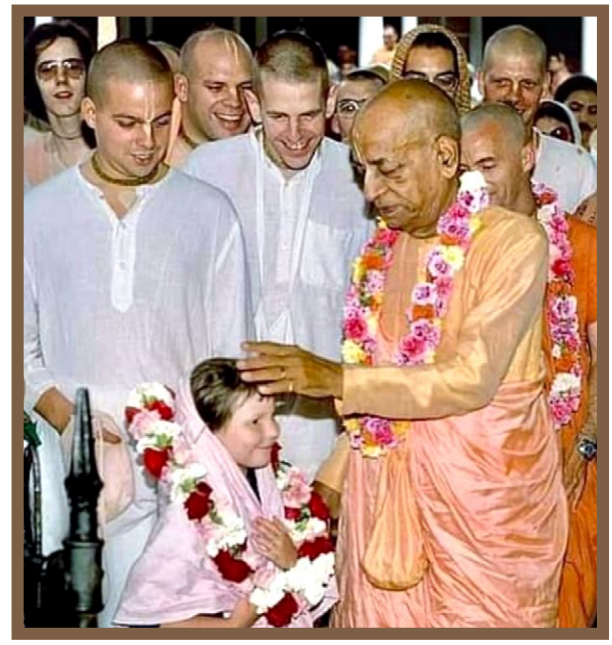
Krishna is Not Western Or Eastern

His Divine Grace
A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

Gentlemen, the offering of such an homage as has been arranged this evening to the *ācāryadeva* is not a sectarian concern, for when we speak of the fundamental principle of gurudeva, or *ācāryadeva*, we speak of something that is of universal application. There does not arise any question of discriminating my guru from yours or anyone else's. There is only one guru, who appears in an infinity of forms to teach you, me, and all others.

... if the Absolute Truth is one, about which we think there is no difference of opinion, the guru also cannot be two. The *ācāryadeva* to whom we have assembled tonight to offer our humble homage is not the guru of a sectarian institution or one out of many differing exponents of the truth. On the contrary, he is the Jagad-guru, the guru of all of us; the only difference is that some obey him wholeheartedly, while others do not obey him directly. (From, a speech given in February 1936 on the occasion of the appearance anniversary of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur. Later published in *Krishna Consciousness the Matchless Gift*, chapter 7.)



Unknown photographer.

Hare Krishna is neither Western nor Eastern. It is meant for human beings. You see? This

Cover: Krishna Swallows the Forest Fire. Attributed to the Mandi Master. Early 18th century

Unknown photographer.

The devotees offer guru-pūjā *to Srila Prabhupada at the Radha Govinda temple in Manhattan New York in 1976*

"Western," "Eastern," they are our own creation. God is neither Western nor Eastern. God is God. So anyone who will chant God's name will benefit. That's all. There is no question of Western and Eastern. (From an interview with a reporter in Hong Kong. 19 April 1972,)

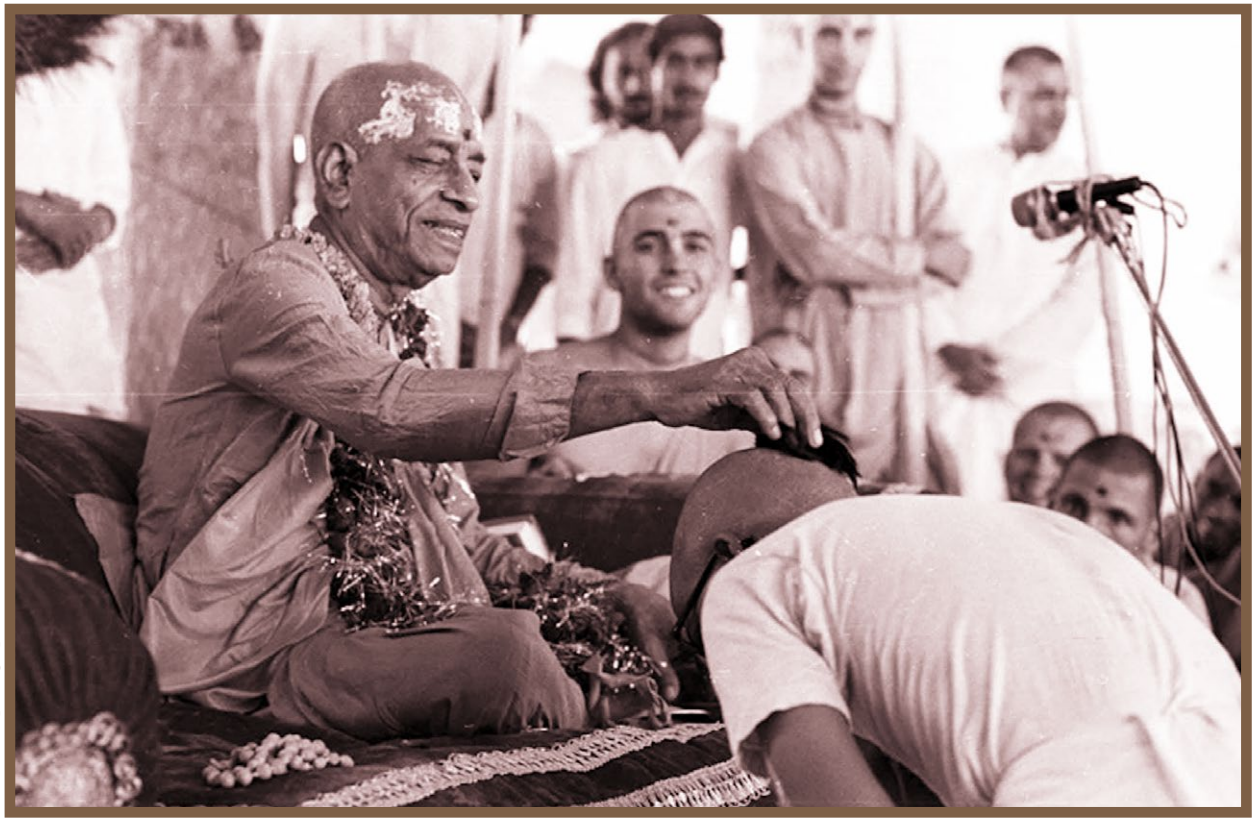
Even amongst our God-brothers we have misunderstanding but none of us is astray from the service of Krishna. My Guru Maharaja ordered us to execute his mission combinedly. Unfortunately, we are now separated. But none of us have stopped preaching Krishna Consciousness. Even if there was misunderstanding amongst the God-brothers of my Guru Maharaja, none of them deviated from the transcendental loving service of Krishna. The idea is that provocation and misunderstanding may remain between one man and another. But our staunch faith in Krishna Consciousness may not allow any material disruption. Please therefore try to be sympathetic with any person even if they differ. The only qualification we have to scrutinize is if one is acting in Krishna Consciousness as far as one is able to do it. (Letter to Brahmananda. 18 November 1967.)

There are many societies and associations of pure devotees, and if someone with just a little faith begins to associate with such societies, his advancement to pure devotional service is rapid. (*Nectar of Devotion* chapter 19.)

For this Krishna consciousness movement, its success will depend on agreement, even though there are varieties of engagements. In the material world there are varieties, but there is no agreement. In the spiritual world there are varieties, but there is agreement. That is the difference. The materialist without being able to adjust the varieties and the disagreements makes everything zero. They cannot come into agreement with varieties, but if we keep Krishna in the center, then there will be agreement in varieties. This is called unity in diversity. I am therefore suggesting that all our men meet in Mayapur every year during the birth anniversary of Lord Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. With all GBC and senior men present we should discuss how to make unity in diversity.

Painting by an unknown artist. Pahari, Basohli. 1720.

Krishna along with his friends, the cows and various forest animals surrounded by the forest fire



Unknown photographer.

Srila Prabhupada gives initiation to a devotee in ISKCON Mayapur. His servant Srutakirti seen smiling, Panchadravida Swami standing with Sridhar Swami sitting below.

But, if we fight on account of diversity, then it is simply the material platform. Please try to maintain the philosophy of unity in diversity. That will make our movement successful. One section of men have already gone out. Therefore we must be very careful to maintain unity in diversity. (Letter to Kirtanananda. 18 October 1973.)

The Hare Krishna movement is meant for those who are serious about understanding this science. There's no question of our being some sectarian group. No. Anyone can join. Students in college can be admitted. You may be a Christian, you may be a Hindu, you may be a Muhammadan — it doesn't matter. The Krishna consciousness movement admits anyone who wants to understand the science of God. (Science of Self Realization, chapter one.)

ISKCON (the International Society of Krishna Consciousness) is a non-lucrative organization, whose purpose is to promote the well-being of human society by drawing its attention to God. We are a non-sectarian society, and our members include people from Christian, Jewish and Moslem as well as Hindu faiths. The aim of ISKCON is not to found a new religious sect, but to invoke the living entity's dormant love of God, and thus provide the human society of all faiths with a common platform of clear theistic knowledge and practice. Members of ISKCON may retain their own respective religious faiths, as ISKCON is meant to establish a clear, practical common formulation of the common ideal of all theists, and to defeat the unnecessary dogmatic wranglings that now divide and invalidate the theistic camp. This common ideal of theism is to develop love of God. (From a letter to Roland Michener, Governor-General of Canada, 24 August 1968.)

A *paṇḍita* does not say, "Only my father and brother are good, and all others are bad." That is sectarianism. At present all the leaders are fools and rascals because they are simply sectarian, thinking, "I am good, my brother is good, my father

Contemporary painting by Rayana Giridhar Gowd.

Krishna swallows the forest fire

Unknown photographer.

Srila Prabhupada in the summer of 1967 on his first visit to India with his Western disciples. Sitting at Srila Prabhupada's feet is his sister Bhavatarini, affectionally known by the devotees as Pishima. Acyutananda sitting on Srila Prabhupada's right and Ramanuja on his left with a beard.

is good, my countrymen are good, and all others are bad." That is the sum and substance of nationalism.

A devotee of Krishna does not see like that. He does not like to kill even an ant. There was once a hunter named Mrigari who used to half-kill animals. After meeting the great sage Narada, he became a devotee of Krishna and was not prepared to kill even an ant. There is no partiality in a *vaiṣṇava* [devotee of Krishna]. He is everyone's friend, as Krishna is everyone's friend. Just as Krishna descends to reclaim all fallen souls back home, back to Godhead, similarly his representative, the devotee, also approaches everyone and tries to get them back home to Godhead. That includes even the animals. Once when Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's party was going to Jagannath Puri, a dog followed, and by his association with devotees the dog was also delivered." (From *The Quest for Enlightenment*, chapter 7.)

Srila Prabhupada's Purpose

A remembrance by Achyutananda Das

Regarding sects, I was present (at 26 2nd Ave.) when Srila Prabhupada received the documents that certified ISKCON as a registered, tax-exempt society. "We are not attached to any organization," he said. "It is an instrument we will use and if it becomes troublesome we will dissolve it and go on chanting Hare Krishna."

— From a letter to *Gauḍīya Vedanta* magazine in 1994.

Mughal painting by an unknoown artist. C. 1590.

The gopīs take shelter of Krishna to save them from the fire

Unknown photographer.

On 12 August 1976 during his second visit to Tehran, Srila Prabhupada initiated two young men from Islamic families. Mustafa became Vallabha Dasa and Hussein became Sridhara Das.

When Prabhupada Invited a Muslim Gentleman on Stage

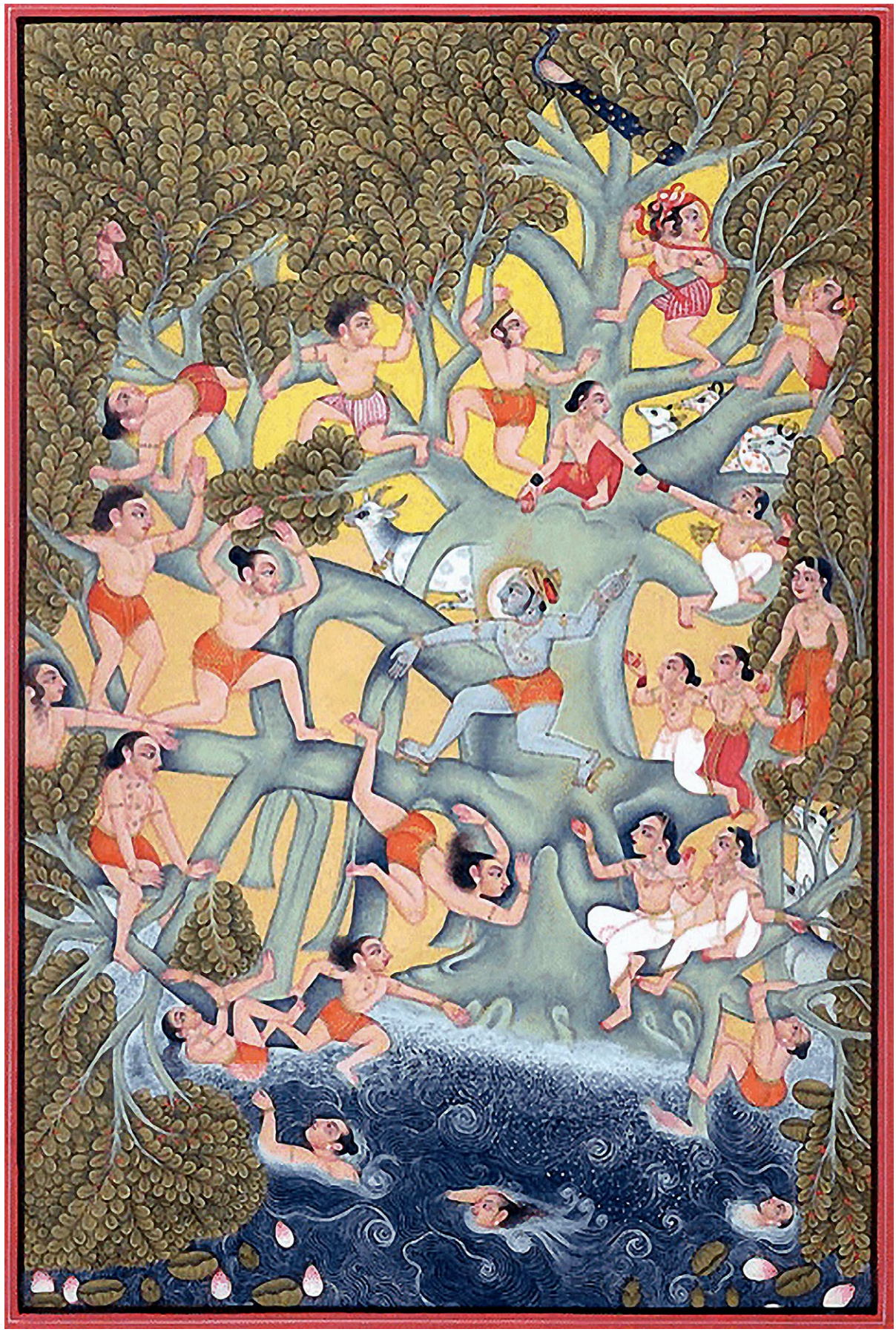
A remembrance by
Sri Srimad Bhakti Charu Swami

One evening, looking over the crowd, Srila Prabhupada noticed an Arab gentleman dressed in traditional Arabic attire. He asked Bhavananda Maharaja to bring the man onto the stage and then had the man sit on a chair next to him and spoke to him affectionately. He was, it turned out, the chief of police of Kuwait. He had come to Bombay for medical treatment, and that evening was the first time he had been allowed out of the hospital. While strolling through the park, he had seen the gathering and out of curiosity walked over to see what was happening.

Srila Prabhupada noticed that the man had a set of beads in his hands and asked about them. The man said that he just fiddled around with them; they did not have any specific purpose. But when Prabhupada then pulled his beads out from his bead bag and said, "See, I also have one," they both laughed. The beads were sacred, Prabhupada told him; they were used for chanting the holy names of the Lord. They should be kept in a bag so that they would not become contaminated. Prabhupada did not get into a heavy philosophical discussion with the man — they just had a cordial exchange — but I could not help wondering what a deep impression Prabhupada was making.

I was also impressed to see Srila Prabhupada, an exalted Hindu spiritual leader, invite a Middle Eastern Muslim to come up and sit next to him at such an important and visible program. It conveyed a powerful message — that ISKCON was nonsectarian; it welcomed everyone. Whoever was open to learning the teachings of the Vedas and was interested to know about the Supreme Personality of Godhead and establish a loving relationship with him could join, irrespective of caste, creed, or religion. 🍊

— *Ocean of Mercy: A Search Fulfilled.* Pp 119-120. Veda Foundation, 2016.



Unknown artist. Mewar Rajasthan. C. 17th or 18th century.

Krishna plays with his friends

Painting by an unknown artist. Udaipur, Mewar, 1700.

Krishna swallowed the fire that surrounded the boys and cows

Sectarianism Is a Natural Byproduct

Srila Thakur Bhaktivinode

Sectarianism is a natural byproduct of the absolute truth. When *ācāryas* first ascertain and instruct the truth, it is not polluted with sectarianism. But the rules and regulations received through disciplic succession regarding the goal and the method of achieving it are changed in due course of time according to the mentality and locale of the people. A rule that is followed by one society is not necessarily accepted in another society. That is why one community is different from another. As a community gradually develops more respect for its own standards, it develops hatred towards other communities and considers their standards inferior. These sectarian symptoms are seen in all countries since time immemorial. This is prominent amongst neophytes.

Adherence to a particular standard is the prominent symptom of a society. There are three types of standards — *ālocakagata, ālocanāgata*, and *ālocyagata*. *Ālocakagata* is when sectarianists accept some external signs. Examples of *ālocakagata* are *tilaka*, neckbeads, saffron robes, as well as the baptism practiced abroad. The different activities practiced in the process of worship are called *ālocanāgata*. Examples of *ālocanāgata* are sacrifices, austerities, fire sacrifices, vows, studying scriptures, deity worship, constructing temples, respecting the purity of various trees and rivers, dressing like *sannyāsīs*, acting like *ācāryas*, dressing like *brahmacārīs* or *gṛhasthas*, closing one's eyes, respecting particular types of books, rules and regulations in eating, and respecting the purity of particular times and places. The examples of *ālocyagata* are attributing personalism or impersonalism on the Supreme Lord, installing deities, exhibiting the mood of an incarnation of the Lord, speculating on heaven and hell, and describing the future destination of the soul. The different forms of these spiritual activities create divisions of sectarianism. Differences that arise from places, times, languages, behaviors, foods, dresses, and natures of various communities are incorporated within their spiritual practices and gradually make one community so completely

Unknown artist. Mewar, Rajasthan. 1715-1720.

Krishna plays hide and seek with the cowherd boys

different from another community that even the consideration that everyone is a human being may cease to exist. Due to these differences there is disagreement, cessation of social intercourse, and fighting, even up to the point of killing one another. When an asslike mentality becomes prominent within the *kaniṣṭha-adhikārīs*, then they certainly indulge in these things. But if they develop a swanlike mentality, then they do not take part in quarrels, rather, they endeavor to attain a higher level. *Madhyama-adhikārīs* do not quarrel so much about external standards, but they are always attacked by philosophical disagreements. Sometimes they condemn the standards of neophytes and establish their own standards as superior.

— From his introduction to *Krishna-saṁhitā*. English translation by Bhumipati Das. Vrajaraj Press. Edited and published by Pundarik Vidyanidhi Das. Vrindavan. 1998.

Vaishnava Dharma is Non-sectarian

Sri Srimad Gour Govinda Swami Maharaja

Devotee: You were mentioning there are some religions that are *naimittika-dharma* [religious principles that are not eternal and divinely inspired]. Religions like those outside Vedic culture like Christians, Islam, would they fall under that category?

Gour Govinda Swami: Yes, but the real religion spoken by Jesus Christ and Prophet Mohammad is not different from this original dharma, it speaks the same thing, but in very gross form, not so detailed. We cannot say that

Painting by an unknown artist. Malwa, c. 1685.

After Krishna subdued Kaliya, the Vrajavasis were in ecstasy. He is shown being embraced by Mother Yashoda and Nanda Maharaja, and drinking milk from the breast of Yashoda. Garuda is shown, as it was in fear of him that Kaliya took shelter of the Yamuna. Srila Kavi Karnapur in his Ānanda-vṛndāvana-campū *describes that after driving out Kaliya, seeing that it was late, the residents of Vrindavan decided to sleep for the night on the bank of the Yamuna. The Vrajavasis then made several circles around Krishna to protect him. In the middle of the night a terrible forest fire came, which Krishna swallowed to save his dear devotees.*

they manufactured something. Essentially, they say the same thing. Therefore, my Guru Maharaja has said, "Jesus Christ is our guru." His teachings are not different from Vedic teachings. *Bhagavat-dharma* is one dharma with different names such as, *ātmā-dharma*, *paradharma*, *vaiṣṇava-dharma sanātana-dharma,* and *nitya-dharma*, etc. Other names, like Hindu dharma, Islamic dharma, Christian dharma, Buddhist dharma, etc., are manufactured because everyone is a soul. You may be a Christian or a Muslim or a Jain or a Buddhist — yet intrinsically you are a soul. The soul has his dharma, his natural dharma, that is *ātmā-dharma, jaiva-dharma*, *bhagavat-dharma* or *sanātana-dharma*. These terms speak about dharma which is universal — that is applicable to one and all. We never speak of sectarian dharma. This *vaiṣṇava-dharma* is non-sectarian.

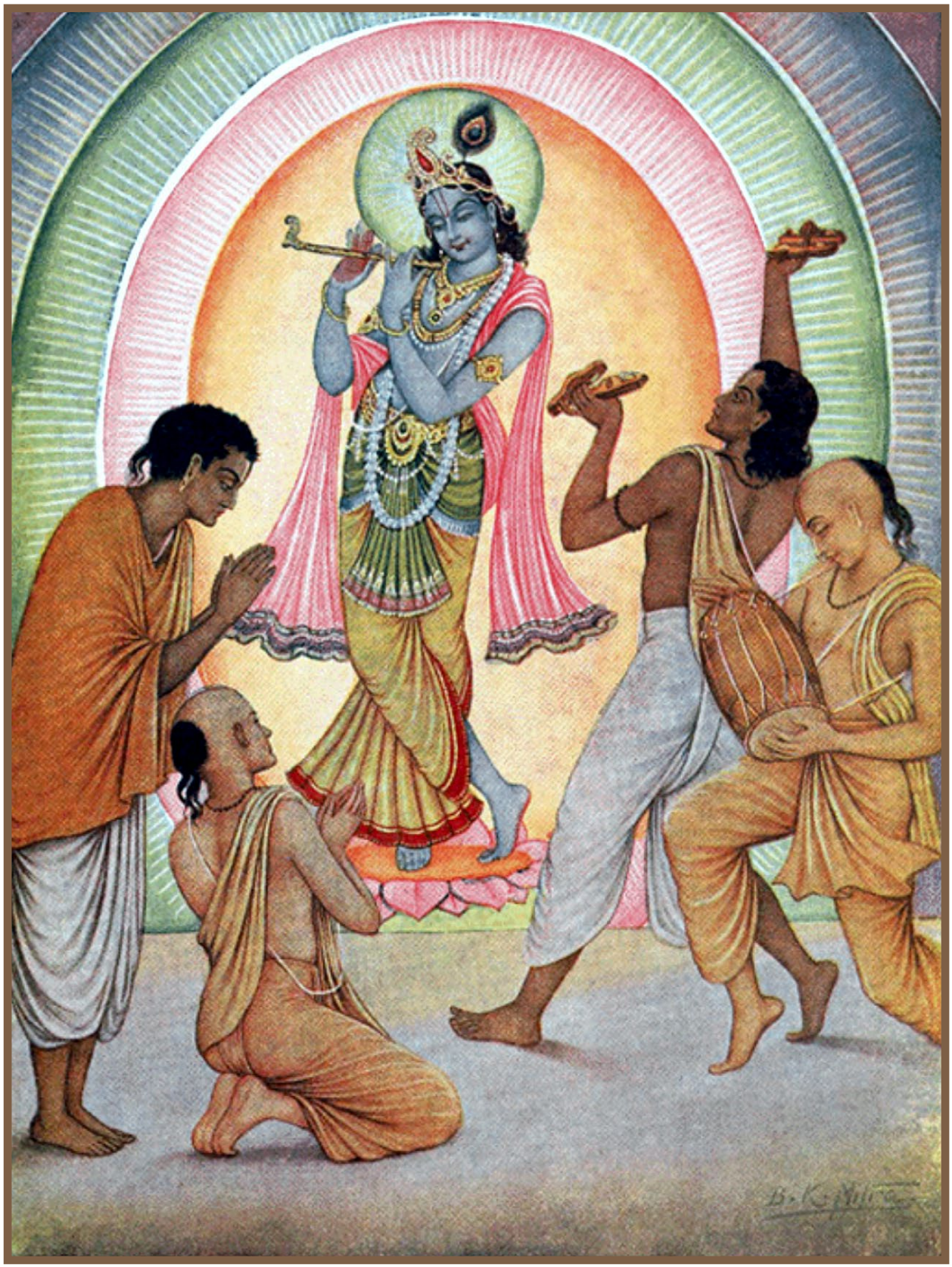
— From a conversation in Bhubaneswar on 29 November 1989.

The Sociology Of Small Differences

By Vaisesika Das & MDas

In his book, *Sri Caitanya, His Life and Precepts,* Srila Thakur Bhaktivinode comments that Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu declared that, "Party spirit and sectarianism were two great enemies of progress." Krishna consciousness is a movement to realize the soul. How is it then that we see that different *vaiṣṇava-saṅgas* are sometimes unable to work together? In this regard there is a psychological and sociological phenomenon. The closer two groups are, the more emotionally charged their differences often become. There are several reasons for this.

The first is the "narcissism of small differences," a phrase coined by Sigmund Freud. Freud observed that communities with much in common often



Painting by B. K. Mitra. Gita Press Gorakpur. Circa 1930 to late 1950s.

Devotees do kīrtana *for the pleasure of Krishna*

Odia *pattachitra* painting by an unknown artist.Odisha, circa 1800.

Every day Krishna goes to the forest to herd the cows and play with his friends

become disproportionately focused on the relatively few things that distinguish them. Those small distinctions become markers of identity. When most of your beliefs are shared, the remaining few become the battleground.

Second is identity protection. When another tradition is completely different, it doesn't usually threaten your sense of self. Christians and Hindus, for example, recognize from the outset that they are approaching reality from different starting points. But when another *Gauḍīya* group says, "We accept Sri Chaitanya, the Goswamis, *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam, harināma*, and *bhakti* — but we understand guru, initiation, or *siddhānta* differently," the disagreement is much more unsettling. It raises the question: If they are so similar to us, why aren't we one? That question touches identity rather than mere doctrine.

Third is competition for the same constituency. Different religions generally serve different populations. Closely related groups often seek to serve the same people, visit the same holy places, quote the same scriptures, and appeal to the same seekers. This creates natural tension. In sociology this is sometimes called boundary maintenance: groups emphasize distinctions in order to preserve their identity.

Fourth is higher expectations. We instinctively expect more understanding from those closest to us. When they disagree, it feels more like a betrayal than a difference of opinion. A stranger is allowed to think differently; a close relative is expected to "know better". This dynamic appears in families as well. Brothers often quarrel more intensely than strangers because they share so much.

Fifth is the emotional investment. If someone from a completely different religion criticizes one of your practices, it may not bother you much because you expect the disagreement. But if someone who reveres the same *ācāryas* criticizes your understanding of those *ācāryas,* the criticism carries much greater weight.

This pattern appears throughout history: Catholics and Protestants often fought more bitterly with one another than either did with Buddhists. Sunni and Shia Muslims have frequently experienced deeper internal conflicts than either has with Hindus. Different schools of Buddhism have debated one another vigorously despite sharing the Buddha's teachings. Even within academic disciplines, economists often disagree more passionately with economists from rival schools than with physicists.

Chamba painting by an unknown artist. Circa 1750.

While the boys closed their eyes, Krishna swallowed the forest fire

Closing Thoughts
From Divisive Fire To Uniting Nectar

In the sixth chapter of his *Śrī Caitanya-śikṣāmṛta*, Srila Thakur Bhaktivinode offers a purport to twenty-one *naimittika* (occasional) pastimes performed by Krishna in Vraja. He explains that the killing of the demons and the various ways of saving the residents of Vrindavan are not only literal history but also represent different devotional obstacles to attaining Krishna in his supreme abode of Vrindavan. The eleventh and thirteenth of these obstacles are the two forest fires in Vraja that Krishna devoured to save his devotees.

Of obstacle eleven, he writes: *Dāvāgni-nāśa — parasparavāda, sampradāya-vidveṣa, anyadevādira vidveṣa, yuddha itādi-saṁgharṣamātrei-dāvānala* — "Destruction of the forest fire represents conflict such as arguments, disagreement with other *sampradāyas*, malice to devatas, and fighting." In short, the forest fire represents division. It stands for both the fear of being divided or separated from Krishna and the disruption of the *bhakti* community of Krishna's devotees that comes due to needless quarrels and sectarianism.

The first fire occurred on the bank of the Yamuna after Krishna chastised the Kaliya serpent and drove him out of Vraja. The second fire took place later, while Krishna was taking care of cows with his friends in the Munjaranya forest.

Srila Thakur Bhaktivinode describes the second fire as *dāvānalapāna — nāstikyādidvārā dharma o dhārmikera prati upadrava; tadvarjana* — Krishna's swallowing of the forest fire symbolizes the removal (or prevention) of the disturbances and harassment inflicted upon religion (dharma) and pious persons (*dhārmika*) by atheism (*nāstyika*) and similar forces.

Finding themselves surrounded by the fire, the boys cried out to Krishna. Srila Vishwanath Chakravarti Thakur explains that, at that time, Krishna told the boys, *nimīlayata* — "Close your eyes."

Hearing that, the boys replied, *nanvaho kautukin* — "You must be joking!" *locana-nimīlane katham agni-parihāraḥ* — "How can we escape from the forest fire just by closing our eyes?"

But Krishna gently reassured them saying, *mā bhaiṣṭa* — "Do not fear."

One of the boys then reasoned, "Listen, friends! Krishna knows some magic and mantras to remove the effects of poison and fire. But these methods do not work in a crowd of persons. Therefore, if we close our eyes, then Krishna will be alone. That is why he is telling us to close our eyes." Hearing this, the boys agreed and closed their eyes.

There is a tradition in Vraja that ascribes another reason for Krishna asking the boys to close their eyes. Krishna was thinking to himself, "Previously when the boys reported to my mother that I was eating dirt, I got in big trouble. Now if they tell her that I was eating fire, she will be even more angry.

Vishwanath explains that, at that time, Krishna was very thirsty. Consequently, the forest fire — being both afraid and incapable of going against Krishna's desire — immediately became a drink (*pānakī-bhūya*) of supremely cooling, fragrant, sweet nectar (*parama-suśītala-sugandha-madhura-rasa*). The fire became a small drop on Krishna's tender hand, and then Krishna, *yogādhīśaḥ* (the supreme controller of all mystic power) drank it.

Both forest fires represent disturbances and divisions in pious groups. Based on Srila Thakur Bhaktivinode and Srila Vishwanath Chakravarti Thakur's explanations, we could suggest a progression of their insights. There is a paradoxical purport from the second fire. Before swallowing it, Krishna instructed his friends to close their eyes. According to Chakravarti Thakur, at that point the burning fire became a cooling and pleasing drop of nectar which brought pleasure to Krishna.

By placing their faith in Krishna's instructions and closing their eyes to external groups and disturbances, the fire of sectarianism turned into the nectar of intimate association. This world of names is the place of groups and division. Yet when we close our eyes to differences and intimately unite on the spiritual platform of taking shelter of Krishna, the same groups become nectar instead of poison, and loving service becomes the sole basis of relationships. In that sacred companionship, external designations lose their power. Genuine intimate association with Krishna and his devotees can transform diversity from a cause of conflict into an expression of united, heartfelt offerings from Krishna's various unique devotees.

In his explanation of the first forest fire, Bhaktivinode describes it as *sampradāya-vidveṣa* — or quarrel and differences between *sampradāyas*. It is interesting to note that the same word, "*sampradāya*," appears eleven times in chapter thirteen of the *madhya-līlā* of *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, to refer to various groups of followers of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, such as the followers of Adwaita Acharya, Srivas Thakur, Govinda Ghosh, Narahari and Raghunandan. Hearing this, one may become confused thinking, "But they are all part of the same *Gauḍīya-sampradāya*. Why are so many groups being described in the same line of Mahaprabhu?" Srila Prabhupada translates *sampradāya* in that chapter as "party" and "group." Each division was separate and intimate and treated as a *sampradāya* by itself, yet they were also all part of the broader group.

Painting by B. K. Mitra. Gita Press Gorakpur. Circa 1930 to late 1950s.

Krishna swallowed the fire to save his friends

The *padyāvalī* poet Yadu Das has similarly described the unity of different devotees in Puri at *Ratha-yātrā:*

caudike mahānta meli karaye kīrtana-keli
sāta sampradāya gāya gīta

From all directions various *mahāntas* or religious leaders came together to do pastimes of *kīrtana*. Seven distinct *sampradāyas* sang together.

Udaipur painting by an unknown artist. 1750-1751.

Krishna selects Radha as his favorite gopī

Although they appear to be factional, sectarian, and fragmented on the surface, by their sweet dedication to intimate service to Krishna, such groups reveal the sublime mystery of unity in diversity, thereby becoming the cooling nectar that quenches the blazing fire of mundane discord and divisive material consciousness. 🍊 — MDas.

Sri Krishna Kathamrita Bindu

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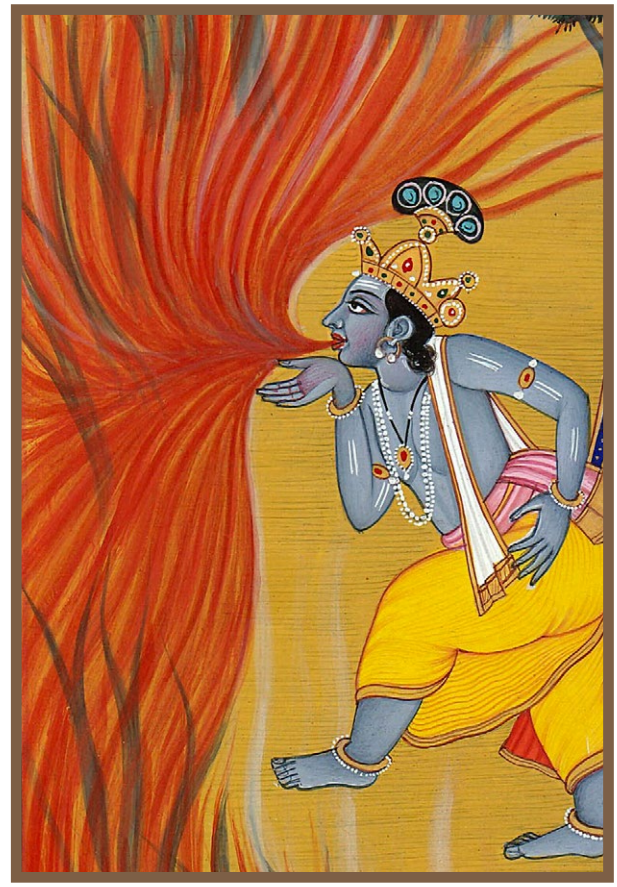

Modern reproduction of a Kangra painting by an unknown artist. Original painting circa 1820-1825.

The fire became a nectar drink that Krishna sipped from his hand